

175 rail-head below the Eastern Ghat mountains to Jeypore and the
 491 Bastar border was continued thence to Jagdalpur; subsequently
 roads have gradually been driven westward to Dantewara, Bijapur,
 Kutru and Bhopalpatnam, and southward to Sukma and Konta;
 the most recent development has been many miles of forest roads,
 constructed either as feeder roads to the Raipur and Rajnandgaon
 roads, or to link up the forests of Dantewara and the south with the
 Godavari at Tariagudam, Cherla and Dummagudam or the Kolab-
 Sabari at Mismagudam and Konta. The Raipur road is now
 motorable throughout the year, and there is a daily mail and
 passenger service by it to Kanker and Dhamtari. A railway
 connexion with the new Raipur-Vizianagram line has been
 surveyed, and would have been under construction but for
 the world-wide financial depression. The revenue of the State
 has risen from about Rs. 30,000 in 1855, then received in kind
 or in cowry shells at a rate of 2,880 to the rupee, to well over a
 million rupees.

• [65] 177 So the old order is doomed; and with the motor-bus abroad in
 the land and scores of aboriginals every month seeking work on the
 public works of the State, in the Assam tea gardens or in the towns
 of the Godavari valley, with the railway administration feeling this
 last great blank of 300 miles from Raipur to Salur by 250 from
 Titlagarh in Kalahandi State to Singareni in Hyderabad a slur to
 be removed as soon as funds permit, change comes ever faster.
 My successors and I, like our predecessors, are guilty of accelerating
 change; but we can on the one hand plead that when we came
 a return to the old isolation was not practical politics, and on the
 other that we have tried before it was too late to strengthen and
 revive the old tribal *panchayat* organization and restore its juris-
 diction in civil and in all but serious criminal offences, to check the
 drunkenness made rampant by a bad excise system, to prevent the
 further bestowal of aboriginal villages on alien *thekadars* (lessees)
 and to make the post of village headman one of honour and respon-
 sibility instead of one to be held reluctantly by some dummy with
 no influence in the village, to abolish *bisaha*, to deprive village
 lessees of the right of taking forced labour, to minimize the right of
 officials to take it and to regulate the still necessary State demands
 for road and other labour so as to inconvenience the cultivator as
 little as possible, to see that it is paid for, and to abolish bondservice.
 Much of great interest could be written on the effects and reactions
 of the administrative measures of the last fifty years sketched in
 these last few pages. But the purpose of this book is to place on
 121 record while there is yet time an account of the way of life prevalent
 among the Maria tribes of Bastar, perhaps now the most primitive

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important, for then the *kasyeq-gaita* and, in a minor degree, the secular headman have their hour of glory, and something of the honour that might be paid to real chieftains. The *kasyeq-gaita* as intermediary between the Village Mother and her children sacrifices to her a pig and a cock, and sets before her a basket of new *Authi*, pulses and beans. A feast similar to that before the clan-god follows. Then the *kasyeq-gaita* proceeds to his *udam-garia* or seat-of-honour, next to which may be a smaller seat for the secular headman (*gaita* or *pada*); it is either a long, flat boulder, or a flat stone supported on stone legs, as in Plate XXIII. He wears no insignia, and is to all appearance as naked and poor a Maria as all his villagers. The men seat themselves around in a circle on little stone cromlechs. Then the *kasyeq-gaita* formally announces the programme for the next year, what *pada* slope is to be cultivated, what arrangements are to be made to meet State or zamindari demands for land revenue or labour, and so on; the announcements, it is true, are the results of previous informal village discussions, and not the *kasyeq-gaita*'s orders independently conceived by him, but his formal promulgation is needed before they can be brought into effect.

After *Koqsar* they are free to cut grass and bamboos, and to collect forest produce, or to hunt; it is true that in most villages there is little game but hares and field-mice, but a Maria thinks a field-mouse the rarest of delicacies, and will stop any occupation to chase a mouse or dig them out.¹ But the long year is over at last, and till the next sowing, though there is ahead the labour of felling, spreading and firing the wood for the *pada*, taboos are lifted, and there is no fear of harm to growing things from the queer magic inherent in sex. So now is the season of new marriages and of conjugal life in the home, and the seed is sown for the raising of the human crop.

It has been indicated that there are the beginnings of permanent cultivation among the Hill Marias. As a matter of fact, several villages have traces of old rice embanked fields. Two things long effectively checked the spread of permanent cultivation. One, before the 1910 rebellion, was the presence of a police station at Kutul, the headquarter village of the Bardal clan and *pargana* in the very heart of the Abujmar hills. This meant a constant demand from the Kutul police for rice as *bisaka*,² and

Assessment
and payment
of land
revenue
among the
Hill Marias

¹ I had a carefully arranged beat for a family of man-eating tigers at Kutru ruined because the Hill Maria beaters rushed in wild enthusiasm to catch two or three mice disturbed by the beat.

² See p. 14 above.

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651 the few who grew it soon abandoned its cultivation and returned to the hill grains which the police would not eat. The second thing, even more potent than the demand for *bisaka* because of its universality, was the land revenue policy. In the remotest times the hill villages paid what little assessment the Chiefs imposed on them in kind, royal granaries being situated at centres like Barsur, Partabpur and Narainpur. There is no need to believe the picturesque story told first to Elliot in 1853 and since repeated by writers down to Russell and Hiralal, that 'their tribute to the Raja of Bastar, paid in kind, was collected once a year by an officer who beat a tom-tom outside the village and forthwith hid himself, whereupon the inhabitants brought out whatever they had to give and deposited it on an appointed spot'; this is one of the typical tales with which the old State officials used to try to disguise their utter ignorance of every part of their charge except the handful of villages in their immediate vicinity. But in actual fact there was no regular assessment. The secular headman of the village (*gaila* or *peda*) collected as a rough poll-tax from every able-bodied male cultivator whatever he could fairly be called upon to contribute in kind, and delivered the village contribution at the royal granary. Even when the Chief in 1865 and 1872 attempted for the first time to settle villages with outside lessees and to assess the land revenue on the basis of fixed payments partly in cash and partly in kind for every plough, his officers made no effort to interfere with the traditional system in the Abujhmar hills. But after the State came under management in 1892, the authorities aimed at gradually introducing improved settlement methods based on the experience of British districts in the Central Provinces. The general method was to ascertain the rate per plough imposed at the late Raja's last settlement, to decide what enhancement per plough each village could bear, and then to ascertain the number of ploughs in each cultivator's possession and in the whole village. The number of ploughs was estimated from a rough calculation of the seed capacity of each field, and further checked by comparison with the number of cattle, counted when brought home to the village in the evening. In the better cultivated parts of Bastar, seed capacity of $7\frac{1}{2}$ *khandis*² was regarded as a plough of land, and in the jungly parts seed capacity of $5\frac{1}{2}$ *khandis*. Simultaneously, every effort was made to extend to all parts of the State the leasing of villages to *thehadars* or lessees, who were available in numbers in the open and settled parts and only too ready to seize the chance of getting the aboriginal

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¹ Russell and Hiralal, Vol. III, p. 120.² The Bastar *khandi* is a measure equivalent to 40 *patils* or 160 *soli*; a *soli* contains 40 *tolas*, or approximately 1 lb.'s weight of rice.

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villages there for nothing, with the hope of appropriating the best village lands for themselves and getting them tilled by the forced labour of the villagers. The theory was that good and substantial cultivators from outside the State would bring capital and improved methods into Bastar and play something of the part played by the landlord in the development of English agriculture. In practice the *thekadari* system was the cause of untold harm even in the permanent villages of the State, where the alien *thekedar* destroyed the solidarity of village and tribal life besides mercilessly exploiting the aborigines, whom indeed he goaded into rebellion in 1910. Luckily, I was able to secure its abolition for the future, and every opportunity has been taken to resume management of the villages through the headmen when a lease has fallen in or in cases of mismanagement.

When the authorities tried to apply the system to wild regions like the Abujmar hills, fortunately for the Hill Marias their reputation as sorcerers was such, and their cultivation was so primitive, that no foreigners would take leases of their villages. There were hardly any ploughs, and the problem of estimating the seed capacity of *penda* plots on remote and steep hillsides was too much for the wits and energy of badly paid Hindu *patwaris*. A farcical record was, however, prepared of the number of 'hoe-ploughs' of land cultivated by each Hill Maria on the basis of a seed capacity assumed in nine cases out of ten by pure guess-work, the *patwari* and his superior officials never going near the villages. Individual assessments were then made on each man, in spite of the communal feeling in regard to the land. These assessments varied in their incidence without rhyme or reason, except that they had been based on guess-work. Men deserted their villages in large numbers and migrated into the Chanda part of the hills or into the Bastar zamindaris, with which the authorities were not so concerned. As it was felt that every good village should have a lessee, and no outsider would come near, the hapless headman of many a village was made to put his thumb-mark to a lease deed of his village, only to find himself in consequence legally responsible for the whole village assessment, even if his villagers had absconded or were unable to pay. The post of headman became one to be avoided or nominally given to the simpleton of the village, whom the villagers would put forward as a figurehead, while the *karyagaita* retained the religious headmanship and was the real headman so far as the villagers were concerned. No allowance was made for the vagaries of shifting cultivation; though one year a man newly married or with a large growing family to support might be allowed by the village a larger *penda* area than others, and after a year or two

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651 would get only the normal share, yet, if the settlement took place in the first year, he might find himself saddled for all the period of settlement with a rent estimated on the seed capacity of that year. If a man dies, his widow is maintained by the village community and does not have her own cultivation; the taboo customs make any other arrangement impossible: but the State authorities would expect her, till the end of the settlement, to pay the rent assessed on her husband in his lifetime, and in practice this became a charge on the village. Villages themselves shift, as we have seen; and sometimes some villagers settle in one *pahai* and some in another. The *patwaris* would report these as two villages, and the settlement arrangements would be made accordingly. When *patwaris* came to prepare the annual rent papers, they might find that the villagers were cultivating a new *haghai* and say that they had not only to pay the rent assessed on the *haghai* that they were cultivating at settlement, but also an additional rent because they had also taken up 'new' land.

These are examples of the absurdities of the blind application to this most primitive race of assessment ideas evolved from those built up on long experience of other parts of India where there is little trace left of the old feelings of village solidarity. Fortunately, *patwaris* were too few, too tired and too afraid of 'Maria magic' to spend a moment longer in the Abujhmar hills than they could help; and those who should have checked their work shared their fears and found that there was more need of their presence in the tracts where assessments were considerable. A high and remote *penda* slope would never be visited at settlement, and even if the *patwari* made enquiries in his camp from assembled villagers they soon began to learn the virtues of concealment; the system, in fact, dealt a severe blow to the natural frankness of the people. The only kind of land that could not be concealed from the *patwari*, because always on the lower levels and close to the approach paths of the village, was the occasional patch of two or three permanent rice fields, on which promptly a very high rate of rent was assessed, little less than that applied in the rice lands of the good villages of the plains. The breaking of land into permanent cultivation should be regarded as an improvement in such tracts and exempted from enhancement of assessment. Cultivators with little use or understanding of money were scared at once by the prospect of more market bickering than ever to raise the cash to pay the enhanced rent, and before the 1927 Antagarh, tahsil re-settlement practically all permanent rice cultivation had disappeared from the Abujhmar hills.

That 1927 settlement was, I hope, the last that will ever be attempted on such lines. The Settlement Officer did not personally

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visit any Maria village or check the work of his subordinates on the ground. He called in the headmen to camps in the plains below, and announced the new rents. All had been enhanced on the basis of these seed capacity statements. These were of the usual guess-work type. The *patwaris* did not even visit each village, but called all the villagers from three or four villages to one camp and asked them how much land they cultivated. If a man said that he was cultivating a large area, his word was accepted, and he was assessed accordingly. If he equally truly said that he was cultivating four or five acres, the *patwari* refused to believe it and wrote him down as holding a 'hoe-plough' of thirteen or fourteen acres. Naturally, many villagers deserted to other lands of their clans in the zamindaria. In the years following the settlement, *patwaris* went to each village to prepare the annual papers, and a *patwari* who wanted to make a show of zeal generally reported that more land was being cultivated than at settlement, and had the alleged new areas assessed. In 1930 I found many examples of this; at Handawada the villagers had been assessed at settlement to Rs. 33 for 124 acres, and, as in the next two years the *patwari* had reported new cultivation, the assessment had been raised to Rs. 41. On measuring the cultivation on the spot, I found that seventeen able-bodied cultivators in all had 68½ acres. Four or five acres is, in fact, enough *penda* land to provide sustenance for the ordinary Hill Maria family.

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Government accepted my recommendation to cancel this settlement in the Hill Maria country, and in its place to impose a poll-tax on every able-bodied male over sixteen years of age. The number of assesseses is to be checked every fifth year, and every other check will thus coincide with the decennial census, and save duplication of work. The headman and elders are made responsible for collection and payment, and arrears are leviable from the village as a whole, not from individuals; it is left to the village community to decide what to do to any individual slacker. A commission of 1½ annas in the rupee is paid to the headman for prompt full payment. Rice or other permanent cultivation is not specially assessed. No annual papers are prepared. *Pari passu* with the quinquennial count of able-bodied men, cattle are to be counted for assessing grazing rates, the annual enumeration of cattle being abolished; the rates will not be varied during the five years, whatever the increase in the number of cattle. The changes apply to the whole of the Hill Maria country in Bastar, in whatever administrative division it is situated.

The re-settlement of the whole area on this basis was carried out after I had left Bastar, in 1932, and was everywhere welcomed

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241 by the Marias. It deals with the village community through its
 651 mouthpieces, the headmen and the elders. Many have returned to
 Bastar from the Chanda Maria country. The best sign which I
 observed when I spent the first month of my 1934 furlough in the
 Abujhmar hills was that the long abandoned rice fields are all being
 restored to cultivation. It is interesting to note that the headman
 has never ventured to keep the commission for himself, but always
 either divides it among the villagers, or by common consent spends
 it on pork or liquor for a village feast.

241 In the Bison-horn country as a whole there is now as much
 permanent and semi-permanent cultivation as *penda*, and the
patwaris have always been more accurate in their records. The
 people are more sophisticated and ready to safeguard their interests.
 The *penda* lands are fairly accessible, except in the hilliest parts.
 It has been pointed out already that each piece of each *penda* site,
 whether at the moment under bush or under crop, is now regarded
 as the individual holding of some cultivator. The people have
 many markets in their midst, and understand measures and seed
 capacities. It has not, therefore, been necessary to apply the
 poll-tax system there. A great deal could be done even there to
 turn the people from shifting to permanent cultivation by recognizing
 new permanent cultivation as an improvement.

Where the Hill Marias have started permanent cultivation they
 have in general adopted the methods of surrounding Murias or
 Bison-horn Marias, save that very few of them have
 mastered or attempted to master ploughing, but
 prepare the land with their *gudari* digging hoes.
 A few now keep hired Rawat herdsmen, but do not
 themselves tend, milk or work their cattle. If the
 recognition of permanent cultivation as an improvement could be
 combined with a determined attempt by the State to teach carting,
 ploughing and milking, even among the Bison-horn Marias, shifting
 cultivation would be greatly diminished.

243 When he does grow rice, the Hill Maria generally does not
 312 irrigate it with water led from a storage reservoir or tank; his
 method is rather to build his dam across a stream or waterway and
 to cultivate the land above it. The illustration opposite shows
 both sides of the dam made in 1930 for cultivation of this kind at
 Tondawada; the deep hole below the dam was made when its
 predecessor was washed away by an abnormal flood. No water
 flows here in the cold weather. First a wall of grass *tum*¹
 was erected along the length of the dam, and behind this a wall of *usuma*¹
 horizontal pole fencing, supported behind with thicker pole piles

¹ See p. 130 for definition of *tum* and *usuma*.

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564 markets. The Kuruks go up into the hills to collect these dues, and they also dry fish and bring it round from village to village in the hills, bartering it for grain, generally at the rate of five pieces the size of a finger for a *paik*¹ of *Antik*; the Hill Marias allow them to sleep in the *paik-gotal* rest-house. They are expert with net and with rod and line. Frequently they stretch a cord over the head of a pool with several short lengths of line ending in baited hooks depending at intervals in the water, while they go across the tail of the pool in their dug-out canoes spanning the surface of the water with their paddles or with long bamboos to drive the fish up towards the baits. They fish simultaneously several little rods tied to clumps of rushes or reeds. They certainly catch fish at all times except in high floods, and send them alive to your camp in water in little dug out sections of trees. As boatmen they are expert in managing their clumsy and heavy dug-outs, which are generally made of *Bombax malabaricum* wood owing to the heavy duty charged by the Forest Department for the far more durable teak. I spent nearly three weeks in their charge in November 1927 with Dr. W. P. S. Mitchell, the State Medical Officer, journeying in their dug-outs down the Indrawati from Kutru to the Jitam rapids, whence they returned to their villages. They were expert in shooting rapids even with two dug-outs lashed together, which they sometimes took through the wild tangle of rapids above Bhamragarh with two paddlers standing in the bows and two in the stern. The paddles are rectangles of teak nailed to teak handles. One dug-out would shoot ahead to explore the rapids, and its owner appear suddenly on the top of a rock to shout directions to the rest; old Kuruks and their grey-headed wives would appear out of tributary streams from riparian villages and croak away their greetings in the guttural Hill Maria dialect, and then paddle back upstream in the morning mist with charcoal or wood smoking around them in broken earthen crocks at the bottom of their boats, carried for warmth. At dusk, after escorting us to our camp on the Bastar bank, they invariably would paddle croaking off to rocky islands in midstream, whence at night the eye would be delighted with their numerous fires of driftwood and the ear with the melodious refrains of their songs.

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226 The Hill Marias make various forms of fish cages and traps with reeds and cane. They dam river shallows in the hot weather and poison the pools. In the rains they make *gorla* piers of boulders in cylindrical wicker-work baskets, like the piers of their bridges, between which is laid a platform of wicker-work, the upstream end of which rests on the bed of the stream, and is weighted down with

¹ A measure containing about 4 lb. weight of grain.

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over from previous days. The female trees bear fruit in May, and the pulp of this is eaten, generally after roasting the fruit on an earthenware crock and breaking off the rind. They also eat the unripe seeds and seedlings, as well as the roots. They collect the seed and leave it to germinate in pits; they propagate the trees also from root cuttings. 273

Individual ownership in the trees is to some extent recognized, not necessarily, however, in the owner of the land. There is a sort of village arrangement as to the trees to be tapped by each family, permitting a rough rotation where trees are plentiful, so as to give them a much needed rest from tapping. The Koyas and Dorlas sacrifice a fowl or a goat at the foot of the first tree tapped, and the sacrificial victims are then taken to the Village Mother's shrine and eaten there by the men. 273 423

Date-palm The *sindi* (*Phoenix sylvestris*) is occasionally tapped in the Bison-horn country by making an incision in the bark below the crown of the tree. 273

The *mahas* (*Bassia latifolia*) is common everywhere except in the Abujmar hills, and it is the spirit distilled from it that is sold at the State excise shops, except for a few toddy shops around Konta. There is very little illicit distillation, the State liquor distilled by licensees at outstills being very cheap, and the pass rules enabling Marias fairly easily to get an adequate supply of the spirit for the religious and domestic or social occasions at which its consumption is obligatory. The State does not tax the tapping of the sago-palm and toddy-palm, but merely tries to prohibit the sale and to limit the quantity of the resulting spirit which individuals may possess. [656] [651]

The Parjas and Bison-horn Marias sometimes make a wine from *mahas*, said to be red in colour, by several successive boilings and strainings of *mahas* flowers. It is called *suram*; I have never been able to get hold of any.

Landa, a cause of half the homicide committed in Bastar, is the favourite intoxicant of the Bison-horn Marias, but is taboo to the Hill Maria. It is made of equal portions of husked

Landa rice or *huthi* and *mandia* (*Eleusine coracana*). The rice or *huthi* is soaked well in water, strained off and pounded to a paste. The *mandia* grain is first damped and allowed to sprout, then dried in the sun for three or four days, and soaked, strained and pounded like the rice or *huthi*. Both are then well mixed. They then take an earthenware *kandi*, with holes in the bottom, and cover the holes with a lattice of bamboo slices, on which they place *niari* leaves. The mixed rice or *huthi* and sprouted *mandia* are piled on these leaves. The *kandi* is then placed on a *kandi* of